

Ross Winn



Digging Up  
a Tennessee Anarchist



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...Introduction...

## **“Ross Winn in the Anarchist Universe”**

**By Robert P. Helms**

I happen to be afflicted with anarchist history. Wherever I go, whomever I speak to, I gravitate into a conversation about some dead anarchist that I recently discovered. I've been searching these dead people out for over ten years now, and so my mind is densely populated with radical personalities of another age.

Some people ask me how the family life of this obscure anarchist, or the day-job of that, both of whose names never appear even in the indexes of published anarchist histories, mean anything at all to me. A few of the many reasons come quickly to mind.

When we meet some regular person, who holds mainstream opinions about politics and social affairs, they will have no trouble giving a list of ten or twenty reasons why they believe there should be a government, or why some people should be left to play on vast private properties while others die on the sidewalk. The arguments might be drawn from many sources, but very often an anecdote will emerge from the life-story of some dead president, from the battle memoir of some famous general. The impressive presentation will derive from events and stories that took place long before the birth of the person arguing for government and the rule of law. Too often the anarchist is left without enough examples to offer in return. However, this is not because examples of heroic anarchists and a world of true stories from anarchist lives do not exist.

I happen to believe that there are no ghosts who wander the Earth, nor any parallel world where dead people hang around forever, spending their afterlife but never writing any new books. The fact remains that the dead exist, and play a prominent role within the psychology of the living. They no longer exist, but we constantly think about them.

One obstacle standing in the way of cultivating a broader anarchist historical base is in academia. For every professional historian of the movement who are genuine investigators, scouring the earth for primary sources and previously unexamined anarchist lives, there are another ten who are busy writing the 40th re-hash of Emma Goldman's memoirs. I have focused mainly on anarchist events at Philadelphia, and so I make a point of reading new essays on that city's shining star, Voltairine de Cleyre. Even the better of these essays in recent years lack evidence of new field research, nor, in most cases, even a re-examination of the same documents that informed Paul Avrich's 1978 biography. I've examined her life to the point where I can tell which archives the writer has or has not personally visited. It is for this reason that I am more than delighted by the new investigations of the Southern anarchist Ross Winn by Shaun and Ally.

I find that the best way to look into anarchist history is in one's home town. This is where to find the sources that are available only if the researcher comes in person. It is where we're most likely to locate the living descendants of the comrades we have fallen in love with. The historical volumes we find in the stacks at the university library should provide only the starting-place for the research we do. Otherwise, we can only hope to make a few fresh comments on what's already there. This is the task of many university professors now writing about anarchism: to write very impressive term papers.

We shade-tree historians, who do this only for the love of our subject, and who almost never get paid even a little for our historical research, must look into entirely new topics in order to be motivated; to keep us on the job long enough to get results. We are possessed by the hunt. We check and re-check the mailbox for copies of a death record or a century-old university alumnus file. We look forward to our next ten-hour session in the newspaper room of a library, searching through roll after roll of microfilm for a few column-inches about the comrades who walked the same street as we do now; who fought against earlier forms of the same regional injustices as we face today. We look for the anarchist soul-mates who spoke our language, and with the same accent.

I met Shaun and Ally in a bowling alley full of anarchists. They were from Nashville, so I told them what I could about Ross Winn. I only had some of his articles, his obituary, and some letters pertaining to his death. I told them that there would certainly be more to find, and that he was well worth the research, if someone took the time to find it. Had they been from Northern California, I'd have told them the Viroqua Daniels story. Had they been from Cincinnati, it would have been David Edelstadt; from Denver, Giuseppe Alia; from Western Pennsylvania, Louis Goaziou; from St. Louis, John Beverly Robinson.



Had they been from Chicago or New York, it might have been like at a football match, with remarks like "our dead anarchists were just as cool as yours, you know!" One can get the impression from what's already been written that the whole U.S. movement lived and died in those two cities, but of course it didn't.

Shaun and Ally did what I always hope that my listeners will do, but almost never do. They caught the fever. They went to the library, found a few tidbits, and went away psyched, and thirsty for more. Now, after much time-consuming, original field research, they have found Ross Winn's grave site, his family tree, his photograph, and a few of his living descendants. They continue the search and will gather more. Before now, Winn was a name familiar only to those who had read quite a few texts on anarchism in North America in his time, but little more than a name. Now the man has a face, a family, a personality, and the testimony of his lifelong sacrifice and dedication to the cause.

Now, the memory of Ross Winn and his long, painful struggle will be ready in the minds of southern anarchists. When the legitimacy of the idea is ridiculed, Ross is there to lend a hand, almost as though he were personally present as a ghost, chiming in with his old-time wisdom, when an anarchist in Tennessee is explaining to their neighbor how things can be done with no Company town, no Church, and no Government. Ross is alive again in our hearts, and so we are stronger.

Read on, anarchist. Be infected with this delicious sickness. Take it home and spread it to all the other anarchists in your neighborhood. I look forward to seeing you sometime, on the library steps or in a quiet cemetery. Let's have a picnic and swap stories of our wonderful dead.





Ross Winn - this is an enlargement from a small tintype portrait, probably taken in the last years of his life.

# Digging Up a Tennessee Anarchist

by Shaun S.

From the woods of rural Tennessee, in the early part of the last century, a man named Ross Winn toiled under the burdens of continual poverty, conservative Christian surroundings, and the later, terminal grip of tuberculosis to dedicate his life to the printing of revolutionary anarchist literature. If the setting sounds overly romantic, so did a lot of the man's printed prose. Ross was a poet at heart, and his drive to provide the American anarchist movement with an "organ of radical thought" never got in the way of his lyrical embellishments and genuine skill at ripping into his targets with the printed page.

Ross Winn was born in Dallas, Texas on August 25, 1871. He was descended from German immigrants, but little is known about his early years. Ross picked up typesetting as a trade very early in his life, a skill that he would continue with as he published and contributed to various anarchist publications in the coming years. He clearly understood the value of the free press at an early age, and sought to learn its inner workings for himself. Using this knowledge, he could provide literature and propaganda that reflected the society he and so many others were working towards. In the late 1800's, every publishing endeavor was "DIY", and radical endeavors could expect the same scarce funding and lack of assistance that they experience today. A hundred years ago, putting out a paper required a proficiency in typesetting, a time-consuming process by which each letter on each page was laid out by hand and the pages then printed individually. Ross worked as a field hand (he was the son of farmers) picking cotton until he made enough money to purchase his first printing outfit. It isn't clear where his formal education ended, exactly, but he never formally attended a University.

The earliest published writing we have found so far by Ross is from the magazine *Twentieth Century*, in January of 1894. He was 23 years old when he wrote the piece, a plea for unification within the anti-capitalist movement. Entitled "Let Us Unite", it makes clear that even as a young man Ross saw that too much division between the different social movements of his time would continue to hold all of them back, and would work instead in the favor of the totalitarian governments they sought to dissolve. Putting differences aside, he proclaims "we have had coercion enough. For ages man has ruled

with sword and bayonet, with bars and chains... and now are we not civilized enough to dispense with it forever?" In a later piece, appearing in the paper *Free Society* in December of 1900, makes mention of him becoming a "young 'convert'" and finding an outlet for his own radical views some twelve years earlier, when he was only 17 years old. Ross, like many other young radical thinkers and organizers of his day, was no doubt aroused by the atrocities which amounted to the "Haymarket Affair" in May of 1886. There, eight anarchist organizers in Chicago were convicted of conspiracies against the government, after police raided a meeting which was called to address the escalation of police violence at a worker's rights rally three days earlier. A bomb went off during the raid, injuring several on both sides and instigating massive arrests and beatings from local law enforcement. The event is widely regarded as having helped spur a more fervent national movement after a skewed trial resulted in prison for three and execution for four of the eight men who were eventually tried.

Ross continued to write and contribute to other radical papers, most notably *Free Society*, the eventual incarnation in Chicago of the weekly anarchist paper *The Firebrand*, which had seen a brief but renowned weekly run out of Sellwood near Portland, Oregon from 1895-97. *The Firebrand*, like many other anarchist papers at the time, received continual harassment from police and postal authorities, often on grounds of obscenity and conspiracy against the government. The editors of *The Firebrand* were all eventually jailed, simply for publishing and distributing an anti-capitalist journal.

Sometime in 1894, Ross began his first paper, known as *Co-operative Commonwealth*. He then edited and published *Coming Era* for a brief time in 1898 and *Winn's Freelance* in 1899. There isn't much left over from these early forays into the realm of self-publishing. Unfortunately, as soon as November of 1899, the intrepid young publisher succumbed to the troubles of a complication that would continue to burden him for the rest of his life: how to offer and consistently maintain an interesting and good quality paper, each page hand printed, for an affordable subscription rate without sliding quickly into debt. Ross was forced to cease publication, and called on his readers to turn their support, financial and otherwise, towards *Free Society*.

He was by no means discouraged, however, and in 1902 he was at it again. In a June issue of *Free Society* he made the announcement of the upcoming publication of his new paper: *Winn's Firebrand*, the



# Winn's Firebrand

A PERIODICAL OF  
THE PERIOD

*A Magazine of Advance Thought.*

name aptly describing the devotion and zeal that Ross put into his new endeavor. His vision was for a paper that would "occupy an entirely new field. It will appeal to the cultured, the thoughtful, the progressive of all classes. It will be just the kind of literature for missionary work among the masses." Clearly, Ross saw the printed magazine as a vital tool for social change, and viewed the distribution of anti-authoritarian ideals through the free press as a distinct calling, a work he viewed as a passionate personal duty. Tennessee became his new home base for this endeavor: "In establishing the magazine (in Mt. Juliet, TN) as an independent publication, the flag of revolutionary thought is planted on Southern soil, and a residence of a lifetime in this section convinces me that it will be a fruitful field for libertarian ideals, if the right methods are used to present them." (The term "libertarian", incidentally, was originally synonymous with anarchism, adopted mainly to elide the derogatory treatment of the word "anarchy" in the mainstream media of the day.)

In August of 1900, Ross' partner, Augusta Gertrude Smith (known affectionately as "Gussie") gave birth to their first and only son: Ross Jr. His birthday was only five days before his father's. Ross and Gussie had married just a year earlier, and he found in her a strong and willing friend. The two stuck together throughout his life, often in abject poverty. They moved into her family's home in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, an old house originally built in the 1790's and later purchased by Gussie's father, who ran a general store and a mill nearby. The area where the house stands is also known as "Silver

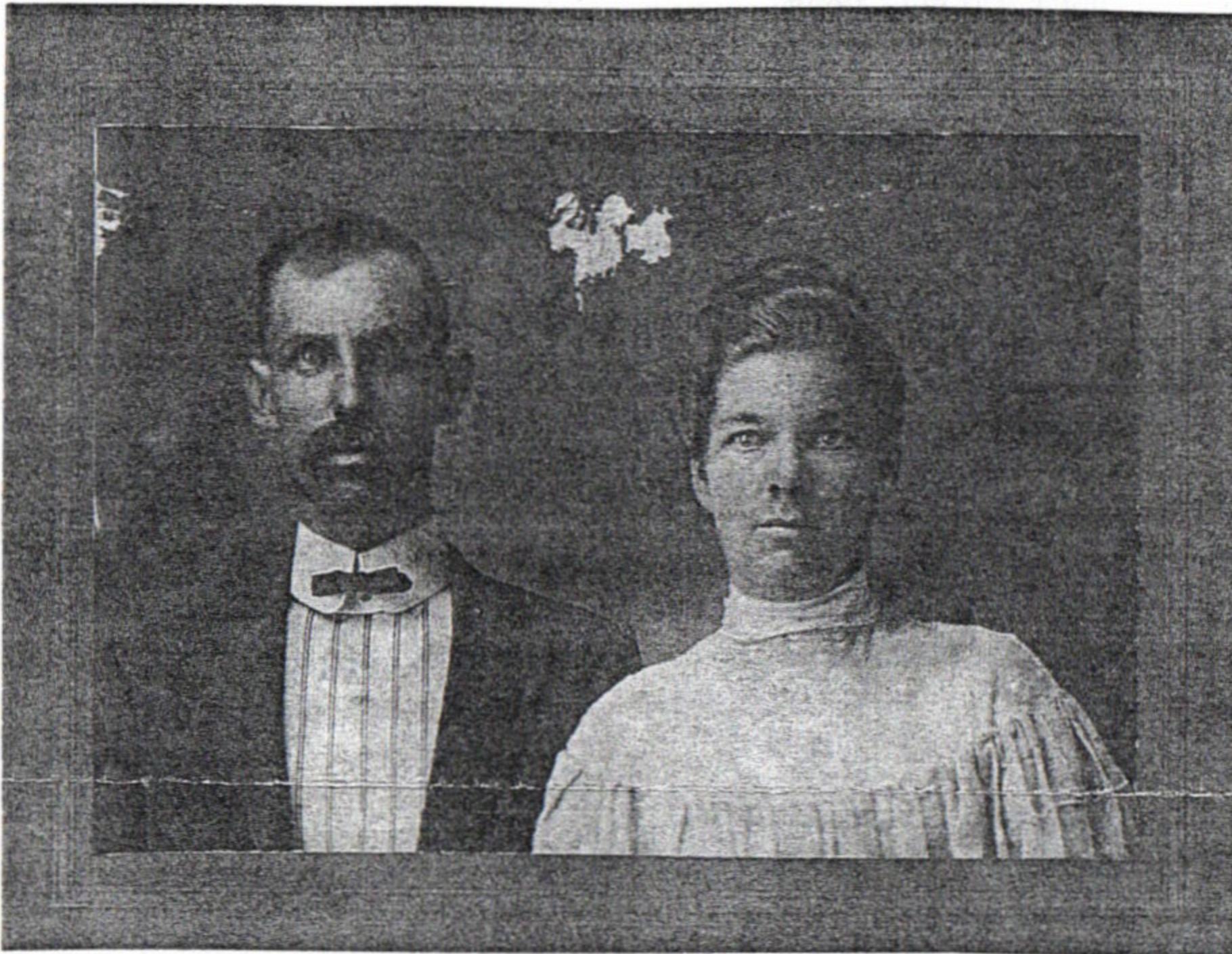
Springs", named for a tiny branch of the nearby Cedar Creek that the home was built along.

In the same year, Ross met Emma Goldman in Chicago, and the two became allies. As she would later write, Emma "was deeply impressed with his fervor and complete abandonment to the cause, so unlike most American revolutionists, who love their ease and comfort too well to risk them for their ideals." (*Mother Earth*, September, 1912) Ross kept up a correspondence with her throughout his life, as he did with several other prominent anarchist writers and thinkers of the time. Joseph Labadie, a publisher and organizer in Detroit, Michigan, was another friend to Ross, and saw to regular contributions to *Winn's Firebrand* in its later years.

Within his papers, Ross devoted his own columns to criticisms of everyone from Theodore Roosevelt to local preachers and independent publishers. He railed against the Socialist party, which to he and other anarchists seemed to claim merely hollow victories for political reform even as their national influence continued to grow. He responded (usually with venom) to the reporting of the regional mainstream newspapers: the *Memphis Commercial-Appeal*, the *Nashville Banner*, *Nashville Democrat*, and *Nashville American* to name a few. He also offered his bold opinions on the coming alcohol prohibition, the American electoral politics game, labor strikes around the world, and, as often as possible at the risk of redundancy, the organized Church. Ross, like many anarchists in his day, believed that the teachings attributed to Jesus Christ were in many ways the same as their own moral principles, but that the Church (in conjunction with the State), had twisted and distorted them into measures of control. "I suppose some people will object if I call Jesus an Anarchist," he writes in a December, 1902 issue of *Winn's Firebrand*, "but I am sure the whole world would call him that if he lived to-day, and preached such doctrines."

Similar to the anti-copyright ethics of a lot of today's alternative and anarchist magazines, Ross also pulled classic pieces from well-known writers. Authors like Peter Kropotkin, Elisee Reclus, Robert Ingersol, Lucy and Albert Parsons, Voltaire and Tolstoy filled columns alongside his own writing and poetry and published letters from readers across the country. Also included were reviews of books and pamphlets that would have been of interest to his readers. Some, such as Lucy Parsons' text on the "Haymarket Martyrs" or Tolstoy's "The Slavery of Our Times" could be ordered through the paper. Works of fiction were also common – Ross was concerned, after all, with creating more than just a political newspaper.

Ross Winn and Augusta "Gussie" Smith (photo circa 1900)



For a short period in 1905, Ross took up residency in Nashville on Jefferson Street in the Northern part of the city near Fisk University. There, he briefly published a paper titled *To-Day: A Journal of Politics*. This paper put forth a much more moderate approach to the issues of the times, and curiously does not assert itself as an anarchist publication at all. Instead, Ross more vaguely proclaims *To-Day* "a journal of radical truth and advance thought". The content mirrors that of his other papers, but diverts in some cases to a sudden and vocal support for the Socialist movement. Ross indicates that "in changing the name from *Winn's Firebrand* to *To-Day*, we have in no wise changed it's policy and purpose", but the opposite seems to have been true.

*To-Day* may have only lasted one issue, though, and Ross found himself back in Mount Juliet soon enough, occupying an upstairs room of the Smith house with Gussie and Ross Jr. He continued to work on printing issues of *Winn's Firebrand* with as much regularity as his finances would allow, using a small hand-operated press, which was kept in their bedroom, to print each page. Gussie's family doesn't seem to have had much tolerance for Ross or his ideals, and

whether this was simply a result of a conservative Southern Christian climate or Ross' personality, we can't really know. One story that was related to us involved a "meeting" Ross was supposed to have attended out of town. This was in 1901, in the months before Leon Czolgosz shot and killed then-president William McKinley. Czolgosz claimed to have received his inspiration from Emma Goldman and the anarchist movement. Even though it was widely thought that he was merely seeking an ideological justification for actions he intended to commit anyway, it became a dangerous time to speak of anarchism. As the story went, Ross was very agitated in the days before he left for this meeting, and very relieved when he returned. The rumor, since passed through the generations, was that he had attended a sort of straw drawing, where the anarchist who drew the shortest straw was charged with the task of assassinating the president. Ross, then, was obviously relieved to have escaped such a responsibility! It might seem absurd to us now, but stories like this only surround the misunderstood, and illustrate just how little trust Gussie's family had in her lover and husband.

Probably sometime in 1909, Ross contracted tuberculosis. Known popularly then as "consumption" (because sufferers lost so much weight, as though they were being consumed from the inside), the disease has roots in bovine bacterial infections and was probably originally spread to humans as a byproduct of the domestication of cattle. Typically, only people with compromised immune systems brought upon by malnutrition from poverty are unable to fight the disease off. It can take years for tuberculosis to finally take its toll on the body, and although treatments and preventative measures exists today, drug-resistant varieties continue to evolve in the world's poorest countries.

Ross continued his tireless work on *Firebrand*, despite his failing health. In July of 1910, Ross, Gussie, and Ross Jr. moved to Sweden, Texas. That September Ross left his family in Sweden and went to San Antonio for a couple of months to look for work. Within another couple of months he had run out of the funds to keep *Winn's Firebrand* going. Unable to find work, Ross got himself into debt and eventually had to sell his printing press in order to fund he and his family's return to Mt. Juliet in May of 1911.

This became a rather turbulent time for Ross and Gussie, as they had little or no money and Ross' condition made it more and more difficult for him to earn a living for his family or work on his paper. In a June 1911 issue of *The Agitator*, Ross announces that the past

November's was the last issue of his paper until further notice. *The Agitator*, published by Jay Fox out of the anarchist Home Colony in Lake Bay Washington, picked up the remaining subscribers to Ross' paper. That next month, Gussie wrote a desperate letter, in secret, to Emma Goldman. In it, she asks for any possible financial assistance from Emma or her network of friends, knowing that Ross "would rather starve than beg" for help from anyone. The word was sent around and money was raised quickly: some \$60 total and a small fortune for a family in such dire need. Those who respected and encouraged Ross and his work were not about to let he and his family starve.

Ross had other plans, though, and refused to spend the money that "the comrades" had sent to him on himself or his wife and son. Instead, seeing it only as an opportunity to fund a new endeavor and further the publishing of anarchist literature, he spent the majority of the money on a new printing outfit to replace the one he lost in Texas. *The Advance*, which was to be his final paper, was born in December of 1911 (much to the surprise of several of his far-flung acquaintances, whose letters in later issues of *The Advance* express surprise that Ross was still alive and printing!). "Sixteen pages of brain-stirring stuff that will tear the moss from your mind" said Fox in the January issue of *Agitator*. But the sacrifice this meant for his family, and the friendly contributions that ultimately funded it's printing went unmentioned in the pages of *The Advance*.

On August 8, 1912, the degenerative infection of tuberculosis finally took Ross' life at age 40. He was setting type for the seventh issue of his paper the day before he died. Ross was buried in his Gussie's family cemetery (Smith-Houser), situated across the highway from where the original house still stands in Mt. Juliet. His gravestone is blank, as are most of the others, but is curiously set apart from the rest of the stones in that it is a simple, rectangular concrete slab. In the room where he died, there is a scar in the original floorboards where a pan of sulphur was burned upon his death: a practice that in Ross' day was thought to sterilize a room where consumption had taken a life.

Ross' son kept up a bit of correspondence with his father's friends throughout his life. In a letter to Emma Goldman in 1934, he tells her that his father burned most of his writings just before his death. If it is true that Gussie's family knew little of Ross' work and held mostly fear and contempt for him, than perhaps he felt it best that his work didn't bring his wife and son any more harm by being discovered by

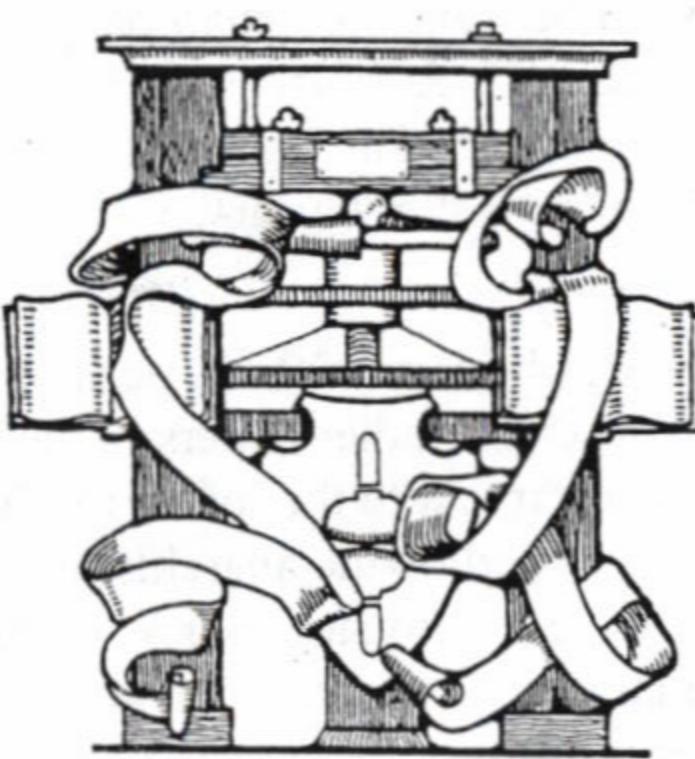
a curious relative. Either that or someone else burned the work themselves, and the deed was passed on as the final, dramatic act of an eccentric and radical poet. To this day we don't know the truth, we have only assumptions and, of course, questions.

Gussie took Ross Jr. to Chicago for a time soon after the funeral. Although much of the family's original furniture still exists in the old house, Ross' printing setup is absent, and was probably sold by Gussie for the money she could use to support her and their son. She moved on eventually to Oklahoma and married a Mr. Cross, although she is buried near Ross in the same cemetery back in Tennessee. Gussie lived to be 67 years old. Ross Jr. eventually ended up in St. Louis, Missouri, where he married and had one daughter, Cleo Winn, who passed away only in the last few years.

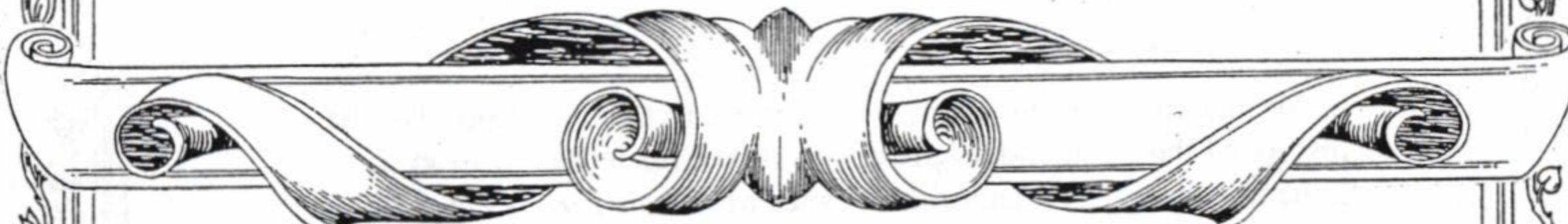
Emma Goldman's glowing obituary of Ross, published in *Mother Earth* and paraphrased in several other papers in the months following his death, is a testament to the influence that this farmer's son turned radical publisher had on the anarchist movement of the last century - a time when revolutionary anarchist ideology was arguably more influential in the mainstream than at any other time in American history. "Never has the power of the Ideal been demonstrated with greater force than in the life and work of this man," she wrote, "for nothing short of a great ideal, a burning, impelling, all-absorbing ideal, could make possible the task that our dead comrade so lovingly performed during a quarter of a century... His were dreams of the world, of humanity, of the struggle for liberty." In this same text, Emma calls again for funds to help Gussie and their son, quietly pointing to Ross' expenditure of their original contributions and the still immediate need of those who loved him.

Not much of Ross' work has survived him. Until now, his name was largely relegated to the obscure memories of a handful of anarchist historians, to whom his name was familiar in the background of the history of the independent press. Several of his letters to Joseph Labadie, as well as a handful of issues of *Winn's Firebrand*, *The Advance*, and the sole issue of *To-Day* exist at the Labadie Collection of Social Protest Literature at the University of Michigan Library in Ann Arbor. Portions of a correspondence between his son and Emma Goldman can be found in the Emma Goldman Papers Collection, as does the secret letter from Gussie detailing their plight. The rest remains scattered about the country, perhaps surviving in the

memorabilia of families of Ross' subscribers, or the quiet collections of rare book aficionados. As we continue to discover and pursue these clues and secure the memory of Ross' work, our hope remains that those who struggle for the same dreams of liberty today can draw inspiration from the courageous work of those who did so in our past.



(The first version of this article was printed in *Fifth Estate*, Spring 2004. This updated version reflects facts unknown at the time of the printing of the original.)





Ross Winn's unmarked gravestone, Smith-Houser  
cemetery, Mt Juliet, Tennessee

## ROSS WINN

THE inexorable master, Death, has again visited the Anarchist ranks. This time its victim was Ross Winn, one of the most earnest, sincere, and able American Anarchists.

Never has the power of the Ideal been demonstrated with greater force than in the life and work of this man, Ross Winn. For nothing short of a great ideal, a burning, impelling, all-absorbing ideal, could make possible the task that our dead comrade so lovingly performed during a quarter of a century.

Born in Texas 41 years ago, of farmer parents, young Winn was expected to follow the path of his fathers. But the boy had other dreams, dreams extending far beyond the confines of his parents' farm; far beyond his immediate ties. His were dreams of the world, of humanity, of the struggle for liberty. He was possessed by a passionate longing to learn the printing trade, and by means of it to carry a message to mankind. His father, however, was opposed to such "foolish" notions, but Ross could not be daunted either at the age of 16, or during the rest of his life. He worked as a farm hand and picked cotton, and out of his meager earnings he bought for himself a small hand press. It was at a time when plutocracy, drunk with power, was about to put to death the men whose ideas were to serve as a beacon light in the life of Ross Winn—the Chicago Anarchists. Verily, Spies was prophetic, "The voices in

the grave will speak louder than those you strangle today."

Voltairine de Cleyre and Ross Winn—two native children of America heard the strangled voice, and forthwith set themselves to keep alive the work for which our brave comrades had died.

Ross Winn immediately made himself conversant with the philosophy of Anarchism, which found in him a powerful, uncompromising, and daring exponent. Soon after the death of our Chicago comrades, he revived the *Alarm*, founded by Albert Parsons and later published by Dyer D. Lum.

Always harassed by poverty that later caused his illness and death, our comrade was often compelled to discontinue his publishing work. But never for very long. Thus we find him again at the helm in 1894, issuing a little paper called the *Co-operative Commonwealth*; then in 1898, the *Coming Era*; in 1899, *Winn's Freelance*. Pressed by adverse economic conditions, our comrade at this time was forced to suspend his publication, contributing, however, meanwhile for the *Free Society*, published by the Isaac family. But in 1909 Winn again resumed his own publication, *Winn's Firebrand*, which he subsequently called the *Advance*, and later the *Red Phalanx*.

Always his one supreme passion was a paper, to arouse, inspire, and educate the people to a higher conception of human worth. So intense was that passion, that we find our comrade preparing copy on the very last day before his death for the August issue of his paper, from which we reproduce some of Winn's trenchant editorials.

I met our comrade in Chicago, in 1901, and was deeply impressed with his fervor and complete abandonment to the cause,—so unlike most American revolutionists, who love their ease and comfort too well to risk them for their ideals.

Ross Winn was of the John Brown, Albert Parsons, and Voltairine de Cleyre type. He lived and worked only for his ideas and would have gone to the gallows with the same fortitude. But fate decreed that he should die a hundred deaths. Three years ago our comrade fell a victim to the disease of the poor—tuberculosis. He had little faith in doctors, and he tried nature instead. Unfortunately one cannot live on nature alone, especially when one has a wife and child. And so Ross Winn had to return to civilization. In Mount Juliet, Tennessee, assisted by his devoted companion, Gussie Winn, and cheered by his child, Ross Jr., he eked out a miserable existence, and kept up his propaganda. Last year, however, his condition made work impossible, but he was too proud to ask assistance from his comrades even. It was through his wife that we learned of their terrible plight and immediately raised a small sum, which might have kept him in comfort for a while. But the only thing that meant comfort for Ross Winn was the spreading of his beloved ideas. And so he spent sixty dollars—a fortune to the little family—on a new printing outfit, and the *Advance* was again resumed.

It was this that helped more than medicine or nature to prolong the life of our tireless comrade. And then the end came. In the early morning hours of August 8th, the inexorable master, Death, stilled the fervent, burning heart of Ross Winn. Only faithful Gussie and their boy were with him. The good Christian neighbors had no use for the heretic. Poor fools! How could they fathom the beauty and love that permeated the man whom they had feared in life and shunned in death.

He is beyond them now, but not so his boy, whom next to his ideals he loved most, and whom he had hoped to save from Christian kindness and patriotic beneficency. Ross Winn is beyond it all, but we are still here, not only to continue his work with the same ardor and devotion as he, but also to bring to his child, even in a small measure, the comradeship and care of his father.

At the death of Ross Winn, nine dollars was all that was left to his family.

Their need is great and immediate. I therefore earnestly urge that a fund be raised at once to assist the family of our dead comrade. Contributions can be sent direct to Gussie Winn, Route 3, Mount Juliet, Tennessee, or in care of MOTHER EARTH.

It is only through the manifestation of solidarity that we can prove the living force of the ideas and ideals for which Ross Winn lived, worked, and struggled.

EMMA GOLDMAN.



# The Advance.

Vol. I.

July, 1912.

No. 6.

ROSS  
WINN'S



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THE PERIOD  
**Firgrand**

MOUNT JULIET, TENNESSEE, U. S. A.

A copy of the cover of The Advance #6, which Ross was working on right before his death (it was never completed)

## AMERICA.

America! Once land of liberty  
And of the brave;  
Dark tyranny now shackles thee,  
No longer now art thou the free,  
Thy liberty is dead, and thee—  
Thou art its grave!

America! Thou gem of all the seas  
And light of earth;  
Though ruled by tyrants, yet the lees  
Of the proud people—the working bees  
Of human hive—bend not their knees  
Nor forget their birth.

America! Thou shalt be free!  
Proclaim it from sea to sea!  
The tyrant's heel  
Shall never feel  
Thy soil again, nor know thy clime,  
But once again will freedom twine  
With live oak, olive and the vine,  
And none shall kneel.

Dallas, Tex.

ROSS WINN.

FIREBRAND - DECEMBER 15, 1895

## "Hello... Do You Have Any Dead Radicals Buried in Your Backyard?"

by Ally Greenhead

Where do you start looking for someone who is supposedly lost in history? I was asking myself this question when we first started this project. In a crowded bowling alley in Ohio, I first heard the name Ross Winn from a radical historian Bob Helms, whom I had met several years earlier in Philadelphia, PA. Bob was famous in Philly for knowing a billion interesting facts about the cities lost radical/political history, and I had imagined him pouring over stacks of books for a few scraps of story here and there. Now, in this noisy bowling alley, he leaned in and spoke loudly so we could hear him over the racket to tell Shaun and I that he had a few bits of information about someone in Tennessee that he hoped we would like to research. A couple weeks later, when the packet of newspaper clippings and Winn's poems came in the mail, we wondered what new and extensive project we had agreed to so quickly.

We sat on the info for months. We kept talking about it and putting it off, and finally one day made the trip to Mt. Juliet, Tennessee – a small town a little less than a half hours drive east of Nashville. We rolled into the local public library with low expectations, but soon found that the small town boasted a significant genealogy department and serious efforts to document local history. We prowled through old census records with no luck. Old land deeds - nothing. Finally Winn's name popped up in a book of cemetery listings created by the local historical society which recorded him as being buried in what we knew to be his wife's family cemetery (The Smith-Houser Cemetery). He was the only Winn in the plot! What's more, the book gave rough directions to the cemetery! It was too good to be true! The book was published in the 70's and we had soon pulled out a map to calculate directions and see if any road names or paths had changed. We drove to the edge of the county, turned around and set the odometer to drive the "6.5 miles from the county line" that the book suggested. The cemetery was described as being located near the "Old Bob Smith Farm", and I guess I sort of suspected I would see one of those great old wooden archway signs when we were in the right place.

We rolled through newly built neighborhoods with fear: could the house and cemetery we're hoping to find be buried under the lawns of one of these cookie cutter homes? It had me thinking about the delicate nature of time and history. The fragile evidence that people who aren't rich or renowned leave behind - old furniture, writing pens, buttons. I imagined a letter block from one of Winn's old printing presses showing up in a flowerbed and being

tossed in a trash bag or rubbish pile. We turned down three or four roads that we thought the directions in the cemetery book described. We knocked on doors, found a family orchard and had apple pies, and were pretty much told to get lost by the owner of the land we most suspected. We drove past the forbidden guy's land and peeked in - there were fallen old shacks, gnarled trees, and rolling fields that seemed like the perfect place to find an ancient tombstone. We contemplated hoping the fence, permission or not. We finally gave up for the day and drove home with one more scrap of info and greater curiosity.

In the following weeks I contacted a member of the Mt. Juliet Historical Society (the group that had published the cemetery listing book) to see if I could find the people who recorded the info that pertained to Winn's grave and the Smith cemetery. From the descriptions of the tombstones, I believed that the person writing about the site had seen it first hand and had not copied it from some older record. I hoped this person would be able to give me precise directions. In a very short time, a historian named D.G. Ferrell responded to the inquiring e-mail I had sent. Yes she knew of the book, but not who had recorded the particular information on that cemetery. Yes, she knew of the family whose burial site contained Ross's grave, but not of the location of the old family home or cemetery.

Ms. Ferrell soon mailed us a copy of a copy of the front page of one of Winn's old publications, *The Advance*, which included what we later realized to be the content for an issue that was never published because of Winn's death. Ferrell also shared stories handed down by Mt. Juliet locals and Winn's in-laws that painted him as a secretive and determined printer. The Smith home, Ferrell informed us, was kept by an adopted descendent of the family whom she thought was now the owner of all the old Smith family photos and artifacts. In order to learn about Winn, we would learn extensively about his wife, Gussie Smith, and her family. Unfortunately, Ms. Ferrell had no idea how to contact this relative, and was unsure of anything more than his first name.

A few months later we decided to head back to the public library for another look. Maybe we had missed something. This time we hit significant bits of info. Shaun and I randomly browsed in different parts of the genealogy department. Just as I turned up a picture of the Smith home in an historic homes guide, Shaun found a report from the roads department concerning a road expansion near the Smith family land and home, which was on the National Registry of Historic Homes! We held the two images side by side and looked at a photo that must have been taken in the 1920's and at the modern photo taken for the road departments records. Not much had changed! The house itself was a surprise. We had learned from a letter written by Winn's wife that he had been poor and envisioned some sort of one story

shanty. The Smith home however, had a simple yet notable grandeur, and it was interesting to imagine them living in such a place.

Our friend Evan, a Mt. Juliet native who had come along this time, looked at the photos we had found and knew exactly where the house was: just about a ten-minute drive from the library! We were so close, had driven right past it! We looked over the document Shaun had found and located the name of the owner, which matched the name D.G. Ferrell had given us as the adopted Smith heir. We grabbed a local phone book off the shelves near by, found the Michael listed, and copied down the number excitedly.



We couldn't actually go to see the house until our next trip to Mt. Juliet. When we actually found it, we wondered how we had missed it before. The blue-gray, 2 story home set back about 100ft. from the road behind some equally aged trees. The layout was what you call a "dog trot". Originally, a couple of two story cabins are built side by side with a simple staircase inside of each. The two cabins are connected but open to the weather and the same at the bottom like a porch. Later many houses this style were built in so that you see the one solid home and don't have to go out into the weather to get to the other part of the house.

The front of the house had old shutters on the windows, old window boxes, and a great columned porch with a little bit of woodwork. We rolled up the gravel drive with surreal anticipation, hopped out of the truck, and knocked on the front door to find no one home and no graveyard in sight. We decided to look around for the cemetery ourselves and wandered down the street and back through an area that was being cleared for what looked like an access road. We ended up in back of another old home, pushing our way through a cedar thicket towards what we thought was the right direction. There in front of us, after a short walk but months of searching, stood the uneven, fenced area that contained Ross Winn's grave. We entered with a pretty severe sense



of awe. Shaun, our friend Evan, and I fanned out to look over the headstones. Many were bare and maybe never held inscriptions, and all but a few that seemed to have been placed in the past decade were anonymous to us. Shaun settled in front of a square shaped one that looked distinctively different from the rest. "I think this is it!" he was saying, and it did seem suspicious. It kind of looked like someone had pulled a segment of sidewalk up and planted it for

a headstone. We wandered back to our truck, thinking about which grave it might be. A few days later we called Michael again and got hold of him this time. He confirmed Shaun's suspicions (to his amazement!) and told us that the square headstone had been Winn's indeed. He also mentioned that he thought he had a photo of Ross Winn Jr. somewhere.



The following month brought us within the confines of The Smith home and in the presence of the interesting rumored descendent himself. Michael was by far the exact sort of person you hope to run into when you are looking for a misplaced person in history. In his care, the Smith home had been put on the Historic Registry, and he enthusiastically pointed out his guest book and furniture that had been in the home for 100 years or more. The whole house itself was like a museum about the family that had lived there for generations and the man who lived there now and collected a wide range of obscure antiques. Michael showed off his childhood train set (which he had recently set up on a huge table for the hell of it), his "jade ware" and carbide lantern collections, and later his quilt collection to which he himself had created and contributed several quilts about caving. Besides welcoming us so warmly as visitors, Michael also possessed a wealth of stories surrounding the family and the town in which they lived. He led us from the chilly front room to the den and back parts of the house, which he heated for his personal living space. The den had the high ceilings of an old house. One side held an antique sewing machine and cupboard, and the other was filled five feet or more high with plastic containers that housed the written, typed, printed and photographed history of the Smith family. Shaun and I moved slowly though

the room looking at the million little things. It's one thing to see a museum downtown somewhere, but another to come across a private museum in which the lives of people are preserved for reasons beyond their being a successful business owner, a war hero, or someone who changed the world. Here was the history of people just like ourselves that had been preserved simply because the people had been cared for.

Michael led us up a stairwell to the room Ross Winn and Gussie Smith were suppose to have lived in, and where later Ross had died of tuberculosis. "Back then," Michael told us, "No one really knew what caused consumption, so when someone passed away they would burn a block of sulfur in the room to purify the air. Underneath the floorboards in this room you can still see a burnt mark in the middle of the room where the sulfur scorched the floorboards." The room was small with low ceilings and one window facing the front lawn. A little fireplace sat in the right of the room. This was the room where our curious printer had slept, woke, and no doubt contemplated the content of his publication. It's hard to tie the actual history and events that took place 80 or 90 years ago to where you are standing at the moment, but I tried to envision the room with more decoration, a photo or two set out or hung on the wall, and maybe a political poster tacked up that only Winn and his wife might really understand.

As we looked at the room, Michael pulled out one of the quilts I mentioned before. The "crazy quilt", which had won an award at a show at some point, was made of dozens of scarps of fabric, stitches, and embroidered images. Another example of Michael's fantastic collecting personality. It, along with others, had been handed down through the family and contained parts of what had made up their daily lives; stitched images of horses, clothes, foods, a tea set, and a plethora of other dated objects. Seeing we were obviously interested in one of his hobbies, Michael took us into an adjacent room to show us that his interest in quilting had surpassed collecting as he had begun to learn the technique himself. He opened a trunk and lifted out several examples of his own contemporary handywork: quilts made of his souvenir shirts from caves around the country.

We went back down to the den and Michael began trying to remember stories about Winn. Michael had known Ross Winn Jr. and told us he had heard a few stories about Ross, which may or may not have been true. We stared at the mysterious pile of containers that held the family history as he began to open one after another, pulling out letters, journals, photos, and the occasional artifact. It was fantastic to be able to handle these things, and Michael told us he worried frequently as to weather he was keeping them in archival conditions. I grabbed a stack of letters that had passed between an aunt and Ross Winn's son. Nothing extremely unusual popped up, but the accounts of daily life, the comments on politics, and family gossip held my attention. It's one thing to find a newspaper article about the old days, but the ability to

record your own opinion and life seemed golden as I read. I thought of all the e-mails, life, thoughts, and events that had passed between my friends and I, and marveled at how many thousands I must have deleted into the void of the internet, never to be found and read again by some curious heart like myself. What would people who lived after me find of my life and opinions? I resolved at that point to print more e-mails, and pass more hand written letters between friends. I looked back at the letters... Ross Winn Jr. wrote asking his aunt about her health, and what did she think about who was running for office?

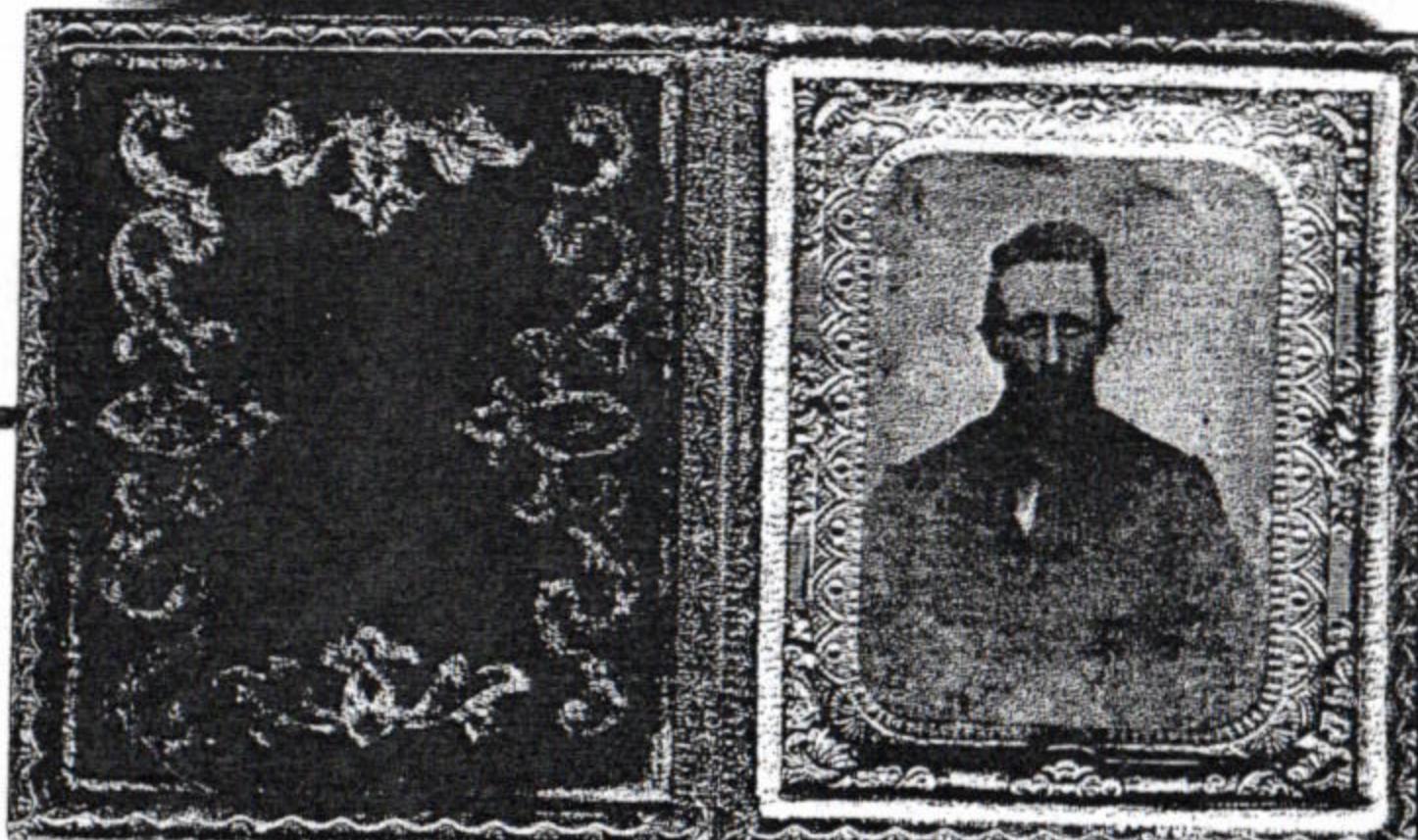
Shaun, in the meantime, sifted through stacks of unlabeled and dated photos, with hundreds of somebodies staring off the paper defiantly. We both admitted that we had an idea Ross would look like every other old radical guy - maybe a pissed off look on his face and a chunky beard to go with it. How could we know we hadn't sifted past a photo of him? We found a picture that must have been taken in the 20s of a couple of guys messing around with a pistol. Michael looked at it, laughed, and produced the pistol that was in the photo from another box. "I've never noticed that, but here it is!" We all laughed - it was like putting together a huge puzzle. We finally came across two labeled photos that were relevant - one of Gussie Winn and Ross Winn Jr., and a picture of Ross Winn Jr. and his wife posed in front of an old Studabaker with a child inside. Michael remembered seeing the car at one point, and that he had always hoped to own it. We copied and printed the photos with Michael's computer, (the most modern thing on the premises, I think) and examined each of them closely. Winn's life was being pieced together bit by bit.

Almost 6 months later, we were still slowly working on Ross' story. Shaun called and left his number with Michael asking him to call us back so we might come visit and sift through the old photos and letters again. Michael called us back soon enough, and told us he had been wanting to call us for a long time now, but had misplaced Shaun's number. Apparently, right after our last visit Michael had found a labeled photo of Winn and had had no way to get hold of us 'til we called again. This was one part of the investigating we were really excited to reach - to actually see the man who we'd been learning about all this time! We were bubbly and anxious the whole way out to Mt. Juliet and swapped more ideas on what we thought Winn might look like... thin and haunted? With glasses or moody side burns? When we got there, Michael seemed pretty excited himself. He had been thinking about making the room where Ross had died the "Winn Room", but hadn't really moved forward with the idea for a while. "Now I can get this enlarged, put it in a really nice frame, and set up the room! Maybe put up some information about him too, so people can learn who he was when they visit here!" Moser explained that he had been casually looking through the house when he came across the photo of Winn in a sewing machine drawer. He hadn't remembered seeing it before. "Go look!" he told us, kind of thrilled at where and how he had found it, "It's in the right drawer on the sewing table!" Shaun and I had

stood right next to it. We opened the drawer slowly to find a hard leather case about 2"x2" nestled in the front corner. Shaun picked it up and popped the small latch that held it shut... within was a maroon velvet lining and a gold colored framing that held what looked like a tintype photo of Ross Winn himself. The photo was darkened and soiled with age, and the details were a bit murky, but there he was. He was thin, had a huge mustache that sort of dwarfed his long face and accentuated his narrow nose, and sad slightly haunted eyes. The case that held the image seemed delicate, and when Michael talked about opening it up to clean and copy the photo Shaun winced a bit and offered to take it to his school to try and enlarge and lighten it on a computer instead. A few weeks later and Micheal had a framed and enlarged copy in the newly dubbed "Winn Room".

In the following months we read over and over the writings our historian friend, Bob Helms had sent us and continued to send and share what we were learning with Michael. We visited the Labadie Collection (a radical history library) in Ann Arbor, MI and saw original copies of Winn's publications. We learned more of Winn's likes and dislikes, grievances with other writers of the time, and utopian ideals. We were also able to get in touch with another relative of Ross' wife, who has an old scrapbook of his that we hope to one day see for ourselves.

Our friends Ryan and Evan stepped in along with others, contributing valuable time and effort in attaining copies of the works at Labadie and cleaning up the deteriorated prints so that they could be shared easily. The search for information and artifacts from Winn's life continues beyond this zine, as we work to uncover the history of our own hometown radical.



# Winn's Firebrand

A Periodical with Few Principles and no Politics, and without a Mission, published for the Amusement of People who dislike to be Instructed. It will be mailed regularly (as far as possible) each month to all who caught up the cash to pay for it. The Subscription Price ought to be three dollars a year, but it isn't.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE, FIFTY CENTS A YEAR.  
Published monthly by Ross Winn, at Mount Juliet, Tennessee.  
Office: The Brandcroft Shop, Lebanon Road.

The Nashville American advances the astonishing assertion that the nomination of Grover Cleveland would be a "vindication of Democratic principles." I was not aware that the American's wing of the Democratic party ever had any principles. If it stands for anything but boodle and buncombe, gall and greed, the fact has been carefully concealed.

DEAN SWIFT, in his satirical romance, "Gulliver's Travels," tells of a philosopher who spent a lifetime trying to discover a process for extracting sunshine from cucumbers, his plan being to bottle up the manufactured sunshine for use in cloudy and cold weather. For several centuries humanity has been trying to extract social happiness and personal benefit from legislation and government; and it hasn't succeeded any better than the fellow with his cucumber sunshine experiment.

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THE Nashville Socialists complain that the newspapers of that sleepy hamlet have adopted a concerted policy of ignoring the local Socialist party. The Nashville newspapers would ignore the day of judgement, if it threatened any serious consequences to the political boodlers of that city of rocks and rampant rascality.

An honest man is the noblest work of God. But God does not appear to be working much these days.

One of my Tennessee exchanges modestly announces that it is published for thinkers. It must have a limited circulation.

## The Firebrand

A JOURNAL OF  
POLITICS AND SOCIOLOGY.

Ross Winn, Editor and Publisher

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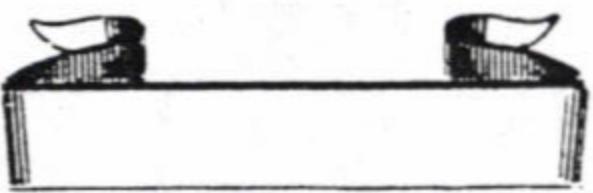
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PUBLISHED AT  
THE BRANDCROFT SHOP,  
MOUNT JULIET, TENNESSEE, U. S. A.

DECEMBER 1, 1902.

IN all of the political party platforms there is not one note for personal liberty; not a single plea for the sovereignty of the individual. The trend of political thought, with the masses, is toward collectivism, centralization and concentration of administration. Even the Democracy bestows only a few weak platitudes upon her time-honored and once all-important doctrine of State rights, a doctrine that leads most logically to that of individual rights. An Autonomist, after reading the various platforms, finds little or nothing in any of the political parties to command his approval—not even the puerile tariff plank of the Democrats. Can anything else be expected from politics, which is the science of makeshift?

From a January, 1903 issue of *Winn's Firebrand* comes this interesting note. In the rural parts of Tennessee, Winn was unfortunately so far removed from current events that he was unable to get an update before the final printing of his paper...

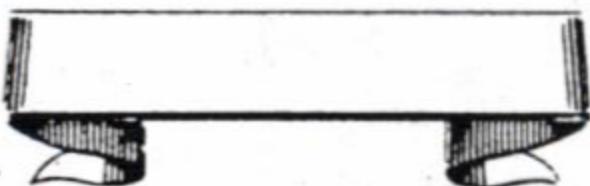


### Voltairine De Cleyre.

Most of my readers are doubtless acquainted with the sad and terrible news of the shooting of our beloved and gifted comrade, Voltairine De Cleyre. We of THE FIREBRAND office are so far from telegraphic communication that, as our paper goes to press, we are yet in ignorance of our stricken comrade's condition. But we hope for the best.

We are indebted to Comrade James Myers, of Philadelphia, for a report of the sad affair, and for newspaper clippings.

Herman Helcher, the assailant of Comrade De Cleyre, seems from the account, to be an unfortunate victim of one of those false and vicious ideas that form the basis of Christian ethics. The idea of love-ownership, which is the foundation of the present system of legal marriage, was the logical motive that impelled this weak-minded boy to commit his terrible deed. Thousands of similar cases have occurred and are constantly occurring. Much as all of us would deplore the death of our gifted, grand and gloriously intellectual Voltairine De Cleyre, we can only pity her slayer as the victim of false and fatal teachings, which it is the mission of Anarchy to destroy.





On the afternoon of December 19, 1902, Voltairine de Cleyre was shot three times in the upper body by her mentally ill former language student, 24-year old Herman Helcher. The affair was covered in minute detail through Christmas Day in the Philadelphia mainstream daily North American in a way that was surprisingly favorable toward the anarchists. De Cleyre touched the public heart by refusing to help Herman's prosecutors in any way, and for raising money for his defense and medical care. Helcher was an anarchist, but badly deranged. He was convicted and sentenced to 6 years, 9 months as a sane person. He died before that term was over, after moving from jail, to asylum, to his mother's house, then back to the asylum. Voltairine was saved from death by the quick action of her comrades, who included several distinguished physicians. She carried all three bullets inside her for the rest of her life. Before the affair was over, she was compared to Jesus in a mainstream paper, and depicted as a devoted and loyal daughter as well. This was something of a miracle, in light of the widespread hatred of anarchists that followed the assassination of President McKinley (by still another anarchist with psychological troubles) in September 1901.

-Robert Helms

# The Archic.

(A FAIRY TAILE.)

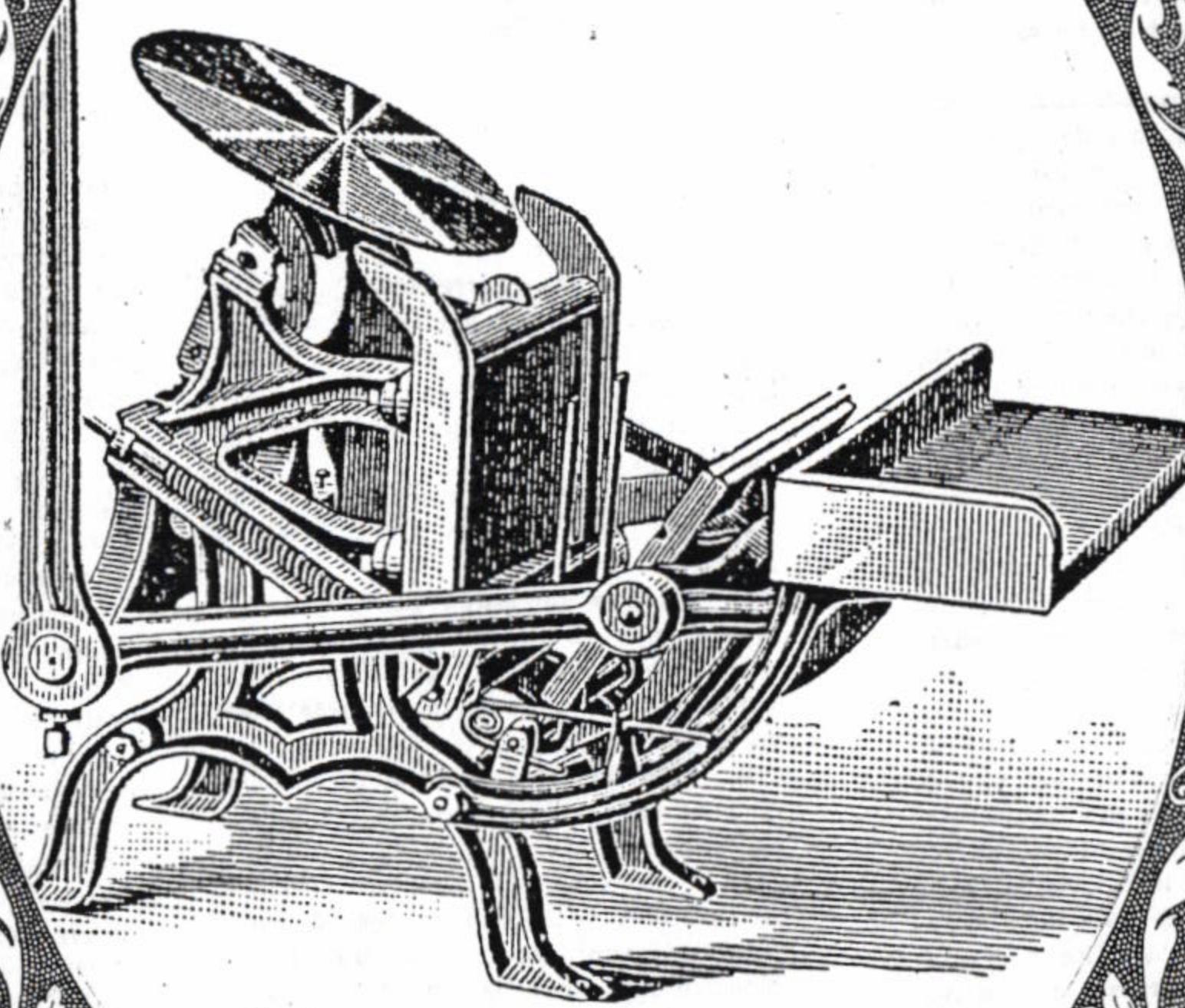
ONCE upon a time, in a kingdom situated between two seas, the people kept a certain great monster, called an archic. This archic was a most ferocious beast with great iron claws and teeth, and a mouth large enough to swallow a dozen men at a gulph. The people held this frightful monster in great esteem, altho it was a great burden to them, for it had to be fed constantly upon the very fat of the land, and demanded human flesh and blood, as well as the choice fruits of the soil, and it was always hungry. This savage beast had to be securely chained, and a vast number of men, called archons, or officers of the archic, were required to feed and care for the monster. Every once in a while the archic would break his chain and do no end of mischief among the people; and at all times he had to have human blood to satisfy his appetite. Altho the people feared the archic greatly, they agreed that he was a necessary evil, and very useful to keep other evil-doers quiet, for when a man did anything not approved by the people, they gave him to the archic. It thus happened that, if a man was very wealthy, he could appease the appetite of the beast with such things as it liked to feed upon, and thus escape himself; but when a poor man, who had not the means to appease the monster's appetite, fell into its clutches he was apt to fare rather badly.

But the people, tho they were agreed that the archic was a useful and necessary evil, were not satisfied with the manner in which it was kept, and they were continually devising new methods of feeding it, and of utilizing its usefulness.

Some wanted to curtail its activity as much as possible, while others wished to lengthen its chain, and give it more scope and power. But there were a few individuals who said that the monster ought to be killed. These persons were called Anarchists; and the vast majority of the people regarded them as very bad and wicked. And especially the archons, or keepers of the archic, who said that the Anarchists should be given to the archic as a sacrifice to law and order. But the Anarchists continued to reason with the people, and at last so many of them were convinced, that they began to ignore the archic, and refused to contribute to its support. The result was that the archic, deprived of its daily supply of food, sickened and died; and when it was no more, the people discovered that it had been a great curse, an unmixed evil that was not in the least necessary to their happiness, but on the contrary, had made life miserably for all the people without their knowing the cause. And there was great rejoicing, and everybody declared that they had always been Anarchists to the third and forth generation of ancestors. R. W.

from *Wim's Firebrand*, vol. 2 #1 January, 1903

This is the style of press that Ross most likely used to print his papers. When Emma Goldman wrote in his obituary that Ross spent nearly all of the money she'd helped to raise for him and his family on a new printing outfit, it was probably one very similar to this. Retail price at the time was \$35 - \$45...



I get the paper out myself,  
working it off one page at  
a time on a "Pilot" hand  
press — devilish slow work  
it is, too.

## FREE MARRIAGE.

I am an Anarchist. I believe in liberty, absolute, unlimited. I believe that every man, woman and child should be free. But I do not believe in all the absurdities garbed and masked behind the word Anarchy, as expounded by many of its professed apostles. I do not believe that Anarchy stands for unorganized chaos, (1) or that liberty leads to a planless pandemonium. I believe in social organization, with co-operation as the basic principle.

The pernicious doctrine that the family must be disrupted, in order to reach perfect and harmonious freedom under Anarchy, is too much propagated by a certain class of writers and speakers, whose prominence in our movement is a misfortune to the cause they profess to champion. I certainly do not believe in a law-enforced marriage, in sex relations founded upon any kind of force, save the force of attraction, of love (2) I am old fashioned and orthodox to that extent—I believe in love. I believe in the beauties of family life, and in the reality of family ties. I would rather be the sole monarch (3) of one true woman's heart than the temporary lover of a dozen Cleopatras, whose charms are mostly second-hand, and in whose love-caresses I may see the practiced art of the refined harlot. (4) The family is the foundation of all refinement, of all morality, of all that is noble and pure in human character and thought; and without the family society would become, 'ere the transit of two suns, a brothel, man an unchained tiger, and civilization an iridescent dream (5)

I believe in love and marriage—free love and free marriage (6)—and, above all, in the family life. The family constitutes the home; and without the

home there can be no civilization, no morality, no order, nothing but universal chaos. (7) The free home and the free family life must be the basis of the free commune, as the free commune must be the foundation of that free international society for which the gospel of Anarchy stands. Otherwise Anarchy is but a horrid vision of that universal chaos so frequently associated with the term by our enemies. (8)

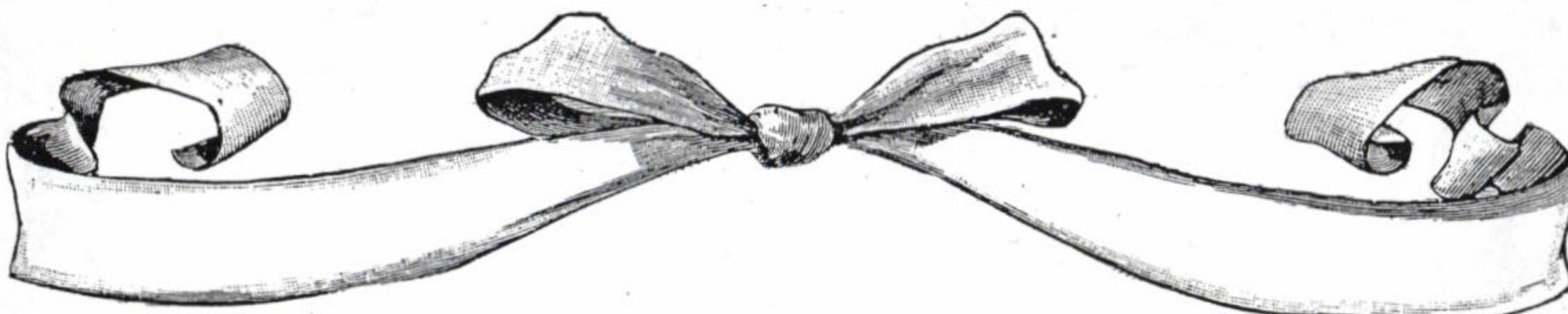
Silver Springs, Tenn. Ross WINN.

### COMMENT.

1. Who does?
2. Then what quarrel have you with sex reformers, who are trying to establish that very principle of love as the only basis of sex association?
3. Is this the language of a believer in liberty?
4. When you find a free lover who idealizes harlotry, your criticism will be applicable.
5. Exactly the language which governmentalists use, to prove (?) that Anarchy would lead to chaos. Such bombastic phrases and dogmatic assertions carry no weight.
6. How can freedom exist in a state of bondage? Better look up the definition of marriage.
7. Even were this true, who wishes to interfere with family ties, by any who find happiness and growth in them? You are fighting a bogey of your own imagination. All that we ask is the elimination of compulsion. Only one who wishes to enslave another, after love has departed, could object to our aim. Those who prefer dualism in sex association will be perfectly free to live

their life, and rear their family as they see fit. Nor will varietists boycott, ostracize, and constantly sneer at them; nor denounce them as immoral, vicious, and degraded. No varietist wishes to compel anybody to follow his example; it is the monogamists who are constantly insisting that all must be forced to do as they do. Comrade Winn has missed his aim, and is shooting at the wrong man.

8. The free home, the free family, the free commune, and all other good things, are involved in the fundamental principle of liberty. He who dares not trust liberty; and cannot credit free men and women with the ability to adjust their own social, domestic, and economic relations, without being held subject to certain fixed rules, is still a victim to the idea of uniformity, against which Anarchists strenuously contend. A diversified human nature calls for many varied forms of expression; out of which men and women, in a free society, gather an experience, which leads gradually to improved methods of living. Such is the process of evolution, and the monogamic family relation is no exception. It has no more "right of way" than any other institution. In a free society, it will be put to the test by the many who believe in it, and will stand or fall on its own merits, in comparison with other domestic arrangements. What more can the honest believer in its superiority demand? Time will show whether he is right or wrong; and rhetorical thunderbolts hurled at the head of those who differ from him will hardly serve his cause. Had we not better leave these things to the future, to the decision of the individuals whom they concern, and devote ourselves here and now to maintaining the cause of freedom?



This is one of the more curious published writings we have from Ross, from an issue of *Free Society* dated September 2, 1900. It is an article concerning his ideas on marriage that has been annotated by another, unknown, author. It would be interesting to know whether the article was originally published without feedback, or whether an editor of the paper saw it fit to dissect Winn's writing in its first printing.

## Anarchy, Family, Morality, and Ross Winn

by Sunfrog

A contemporary and comrade of Emma Goldman, a poetic and visionary anti-statist, a dedicated revolutionary, Tennessee's own anarchist ancestor Ross Winn is buried in Mt. Juliet, just a short drive from the rural collective land that the Fifth Estate calls home. Thanks to the tireless research and contagious curiosity of my friends, I've been exposed to many of Winn's writings and endorse the proliferation of his legacy, especially in light of those who would claim this region's history as the sole province of confederate nostalgia. But unfortunately, not all of Winn's writings are as visionary as his basic anarchist premise. Like some of his more uptight contemporaries then and the repressed lifestyle-police today, Winn rejected the abolition of marriage and sexual freedom promoted almost universally by first-wave feminists and by anarchist Emma Goldman and others like her. So as we reclaim Winn as one of our "Jubilee Saints" (to use the Autonomedia Calendar term), we should remember even anarchist saints can be wrong about some things while right about others. Sadly, wrong is what Ross Winn is about sexual freedom.

In a rant simply called "Free Marriage," published in Free Society in September 1900, Winn uncovers his conservative, family-values side. To prepare us for his preaching, Winn first warns the reader not to confuse anarchy with "unorganized chaos" and "planless pandemonium." Then, he refutes sexual freedom as a "pernicious doctrine." People concerned with a libertarian psychology have shown again and again that the authoritarian and patriarchal family can in fact lay the foundation for encouraging the worst in all of us. Even if "the family" as an institution can be reformed, it should not be celebrated in its most traditional and restrictive forms, especially by anarchists.

However, this is exactly Winn's argument: "I am old fashioned and orthodox . . . I would rather be the sole monarch of one true woman's heart than the temporary lover of a dozen Cleopatras, whose charms are mostly second-hand, and in whose love caresses I may see the practiced art of the refined harlot. The family is the foundation of all refinement, of all morality, of all that is noble and pure in human character and thought; and without the family society would become, 'ere the transit of two suns, a brothel, man an unchained tiger, and civilization an iridescent dream.'

Concerned as Winn was with the economic and political aspects of anarchism, it appears he hoped to cleanse the movement of free-lovers, "varietists" (as the polyamorists of the day were called), and other less-than-moral types. Winn cannot take cover under the general social climate of his time. Turn-of-that-century radicals and libertines would make some of us today feel like prudes. In fact, the article Winn wrote in *Free Society* was printed with a staunch rebuttle: "Comrade Winn has missed his aim, and is shooting at the wrong man." Cautioning Winn about hurling "rhetorical thunderbolts," the author of the unsigned response defends sexual freedom and warns that Winn is "fighting a bogey of [his] own imagination."

Winn even goes so far as to suggest that without "family values," anarchy would be reduced to the "horrid vision of that universal chaos so frequently associated with the term by our enemies." To his credit, Winn qualifies that marriages need not be legal and should be "free," but he fails to explain *how* an anarchist marriage might differ from an a patriarchal one.

Egalitarian marriages and monogamous relationships entered into freely and consensually always have existed and will continue. But those who adopt different ways of loving deserve our full support as long as those acts are free and consensual. Sadly, even today, a puritanical purge mentality still possesses some anarchists, and depending on the milieu, some groups would love to push people to the side when they do not conform. Who is it in your "scene" that deserves to be marginalized? The meat-eaters? The hippies? The older people? Even as we watch the 21<sup>st</sup> century America get swallowed by a Republifucked Robot waging a zealous and hypermoral holy war against human freedom, we should be wary of Puritanism in our own communities. Anarcho-Puritanism can take many forms, from Vegan Supremacy (watch what you eat) to Language Fidelity (watch what you say), but it generally is where the one political tendency that universally despises cops devises new ways to unleash the cop within.

Anarchists can do better. Even as we hold ourselves to a fierce integrity, a higher ethic, even a higher moral code, let's do better than the moralists who hate queers and start wars. No more "family values" anarchy!

Augusta "Gussie" Smith, with son Ross Jr. and another, unidentified child (circa 1903)



## A VISION OF ANARCHY.

ANARCHY: A social theory which regards the union of order with the absence of all direct government of man by man as the political ideal; absolute individual liberty.—[Century Dictionary.]

Every man, they say, has a religion; my religion is Anarchism. In contemplating the future I see it radiant with the sunlight of universal liberty. I catch a vision of the days to come—the curtain rises upon a grand scene; I see before me a glorious panorama. The hideous nightmare of government—the subjection of man to man—is gone, and I hear the happy sound of many voices of men and women singing of liberty, and mingled with it the laughter of children. I see a grand civilization dawning upon the world—a new heaven on a new earth, in which every man and woman shall be a sovereign with his or her own individuality for an empire; in which authority shall have no place, and in which national boundaries shall be blotted from the map and the flags of all nations shall be merged into the red emblem of universal brotherhood. I see the grim specter of war fade forever from the scene and over all spread the white pinions of peace. I see the jails turned into workshops, courthouses into institutions of learning, and where once fell the awful shadow of the gallows, I see the flowers bloom. No more is heard the wild blast of war, and where once the earth trembled with the martial tread, I behold the peaceful artisan at his work.

Such is the great hope, the grand ideal, the sublime dream of Anarchy.

Ross WINN.

from *Firebrand* (Sellwood, Oregon) October 13, 1895

## Ross Winn Jr. and Emma Goldman Correspond

Between 1934 and 1935 there exists evidence of a brief correspondence between Ross' son and Emma Goldman.

At the time, Ross Jr. was living in St. Louis, Missouri with his wife Elzadia and their daughter Cleo. Goldman was in exile in Toronto, Canada. It seems Emma had originally contacted Ross Jr. regarding the donation of his father's writings to the Labadie Collection of radical works in the University of Michigan library in Ann Arbor.

Clearly there was some communication between them before this and maybe after, however these are two of the only seven letters available through the extensive Goldman Papers Collection (which can be obtained through most university libraries through interlibrary exchange programs: <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Goldman>).

Jr. was 33 at the time these letters were written. In his writing, he refers to his father's definition of anarchism. The quote he gives, though, is in fact from the French geologist Elisee Reclus, in his essay "Anarchism by an Anarchist" from May, 1884. Ross Winn selected and reproduced it with credit in *Winn's Firebrand* in 1903, although Jr. didn't notice this detail.



Ross Winn Jr., his wife Elzadia, their daughter Cleo (between them), and an unidentified girl (date unknown)

Ross Winn

6264 Bischoff

St. Louis

6416

Sept. 23, 1934

Dear Miss Emma:

Soon after your letter came we left St. Louis for a little vacation, and of course forgot to take your address with me. The day we returned we had to "cave" and of course that caused an upset that we are just now getting over.

I thank you very much for the enclosures. I am returning them as you directed. I can really understand that you are a busy woman. Every one that you knew is writing to you since you returned making quite a large correspondence list. I am so glad to have received this one letter from you, knowing how very busy that you are.

Since moving I have found some of my father's papers that I did not know that I had. I don't know what you would want me to send. They consist mostly of old copies of the "Firebrand" and other papers that he published. I wonder if you would want them. I of course would want them returned. Most of his "..." are in man's possession I think. You know as I told you, he burned most of his writings just before he died. I have some letters from different men, one from Tolstoi that you might want. If you say so I will bundle everything that I have here and send them to you.

I certainly do hope that you are successful in getting back to the U.S. And when you come to St. Louis, I hope that you will make my place your home while here. I see no reason to exclude you and allow people like Huey Long to remain here. You of course call yourself by a dreadful name. Now if you came out and said that you had turned Democrat or Rep. publican, I think you would be allowed to return right away.

Will you tell me the difference between the old anarchist and the anarcho-syndicalist principals? You know I have not had any opportunity of reading any of your literature in this last few years. In fact, just tell me what the anarcho-syndicalist stand for. I would appreciate it. Quotling from one of your paper's editorials he explains the anarchist view, "Anarchism is no new theory. The term itself, which signifies

'No government,' is ancient and was applied long before Proudhon." Then he goes on to say, "The dream of a world-embracing freedom has ceased to be a mere philosophical and literary utopia, as was the case with the originators of a new sunny city, or a New Jerusalem. It is the practical aim of a host of united men who by their activity intend to establish a society in which there shall be no masters, no official upholders of public morals, no prisons and no hangmen, no rich and no poor; but brothers, all of whom have plenty; equals who live in peace and harmony among themselves, not out of obedience to law, "which is always accompanied with threats, but from mutual respect of interests and scientific observation of natural laws."

There was more to the article, but do you think that is a pretty fair explanation of the Anarchist ideas? Mother Loft for Oklahoma about a week ago. She is not in the best of health. She has rheumatism in her left shoulder so she can hardly use her arm. She is taking some cayenne and giving a foot soother but seems

6419

to show very little response to the treatment. It falls her bitterly too. She is originally a very active person. I think it is because of that that she is in the condition that she is. She would always expose herself to the weather thinking that it did no harm because she was strong. The harm was there however and is just now manifesting its self.

I hope this letter reaches you before you get away. I have been thinking about writing every night for a long time but as I told you the moving and straightening that follows has taken every bit of my time.

I will bundle the papers up and when you want them (If you do) I will have them ready.  
Sincerely,

471 Brundage Avenue,  
Toronto, Ontario, 1934.

6420

Mr. Ross Winn,  
6264 Bischoff Ave.,  
St. Louis, Mo.

Dear Ross Winn:

I was glad to get your letter, but I have been very busy preparing lectures, that explains the delay in answering you. I am afraid you don't understand what the collector of your father's works. I don't want it to read it myself. I had in mind that some of it ought to go to the Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan which is an Anarchist Library, or to the New York public library. You told me when we talked that your mother had a lot of stuff and I hoped that you would prevail upon her to have it sent where people interested in "honest" literature presented would be able to read and study. For there is certainly an interest in our ideas. Naturally I understand that you, yourself, don't like to part with your father's books. But in case you have duplicates or manuscripts that you're not interested in, it would be certainly put to better use if it were in the libraries I suggested. Have you talked to your mother about the stuff she has got? She didn't buy anything in her letter. If you haven't, perhaps you will.

Yes, I think your friend's suggestion of Anarchism is very fair. I only wish he had been correct in saying that the philosophy of Anarchism has caused to be more philosophical literary Utopia. To be sure it is true of many countries in Spain where the workers are not only organized in groups in their trades. They shall believe Anarcho-Syndicalists dominate that production and distribution should be in the hands of the workers themselves by means of their industrial unions. That is as it should be, although as both an Anarcho-Syndicalist and Anarquist Communist I believe that the industrial trade unions should be in the hands of the Anarquist Communist Groups and co-operate with the Industrial groups. That is the only difference.

I am still very far from certain whether I will be able to get back to the States. Friends are trying hard to get me a visa, but I don't live & o back too much on the machinery in Washington. Of course, if one could compromise and deny one's ideas, one would have access to a great many countries outside of America and Canada. But I am afraid I am too old to go back on anything I stood for. It wouldn't worth living then so I am not too optimistic about America. If I fail to get back there I will probably have to return to France. If my friends succeed, I will tour the States and undoubtedly some back to St. Louis. In that case I hope you will be able to co-operate with the comrades to make my meeting a better success than the last time. I am sorry to hear that your mother is having so many complications. I hope by the time this reaches you you will have news that she is feeling better.

By the way the article in the Harper's Magazine, I will appear in the issue of the 10th. The writer is certainly, sincerely,

I am enclosing a copy of a recent letter which will show you how very bitter the struggle is. Your Grand old men used to think that our struggle of twenty-five years ago was terrific. What would he say if he were alive now? At that time we thought we were fighting Capitalism only. Now we have to fight over so many reactionary strata. But one must go on. Having chosen our path we must go on.

## Why Ross?

When I first found out about Ross Winn, his story was important for me to uncover because he was from Tennessee, where I lived. I wanted to know why I didn't already know about him, why I had never heard about who he was or what he had done. When, as we began our research, we kept hitting wall after wall, it began to make sense. Ross was an instigator, a radical publisher and thus an enabler and disseminator of ideologies that directly opposed the authority of the United States government. Why, then, would I expect to find his hard work cataloged in the library of the Tennessee History Museum? He, like so many other men and women with similar stories, has no use in the model histories of our official texts. He was just a poor nut with a printing press and a head full of dreams, to be forgotten as soon as he could be buried.

The more I've paid attention to history, the more I have come to believe that there isn't much that we can do to wrestle our lives out of the hands of authority without first understanding what people were doing about their needs and desires even just thirty or a hundred years ago. Not that I think everyone should hit the books and swim in them forever, but the lessons are there to be learned, and we need to learn them for ourselves and teach them to each other. Our country is rich with struggles, *popular struggles*, for liberty and justice and against oppressive power structures...almost all of which have been slipping through the cracks in our collective memory. The reason for this is simple enough: a population which lives in ignorance of the power they have wielded in the past is much less likely to consider trying something so drastic today. Especially if it looks like the only people who are demanding anything are a part of some obscure fringe group. Too many people still understand our history by the "great men with great plans" myth, and by doing so have surrendered their own sense of empowerment and worth, distilling it into gestures like voting and signing petitions.

Though he's only one personality, Ross Winn is important to me for many reasons. One of the most obvious is that his story is so similar to many of the self-publishers I know today: eeking out intense, heartfelt and hopeful texts on little or no budget, scraping by as best they can and devoting almost every minute to their love, personal missions and dreams of a better world. But there are other elements of Ross' life that have stopped me at times from idolizing him or glossing over his story too much.

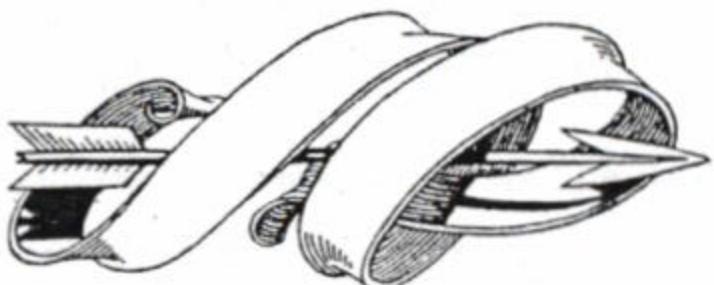
In compiling this zine, I've tried to suggest some of this in as balanced a way as I feel like is appropriate. There are many unsubstantiated rumors that have been passed down through his wife's family that, for some, constitute the only things they really know about him. I can't prove or disprove these possibilities, and maybe nobody will ever know. The truth may have been buried along with each family member who kept their mouth shut or passed along their own interpretations.

The point of this project, though, is more about Ross' work than about his personality for me. Regardless of the mistakes he may have made, he is also one of the few ties that the American South can claim to the anarchist movement a hundred years ago. This isn't to say that there weren't many anarchist organizers here, but by producing newspapers in Tennessee, Ross insured that some printed evidence would survive as a link to this past.

When working on this project, there were no books about Ross to reference, mentions of Ross' name were scarce, and the internet yielded almost nothing (with the exception, most recently, of paraphrased versions of the biographical sketch at the beginning of this zine). The story came together from clues we found, stories we were told, and the invaluable help of our friends. Now Ross Winn again has a story, a face, and a place in our history. From this point, it's up to the individual to judge whether our work was worth it or if Ross' passion should have been buried when his body was. I believe that Ross, as a man, lies somewhere between the useless, thoughtless "black sheep" freeloader that his family may have taken him for, and the flawless "golden angel of liberty" that we want so many of our heroes to be.

Uncovering and sharing Ross' story is important to Tennessee history, to print-media history, to people's history: our history whether we are anarchists or not. It is the story of anyone who stands up against the tide, and it is an inspiration to know that the handful of leaders who hold fast to the positions of authority that they have created for themselves are not really writing history nor have they ever written it... they are merely engaged in a constant effort to suppress and reinterpret it. To continue to let them succeed is to seal our own fates.

be brave,  
shaun



(If you want to know more about Ross, know something that we don't and want to share, want to help this project become a book, or want more copies of this zine, please email "[rosswinn@riseup.net](mailto:rosswinn@riseup.net)" Copies of the zine are available from me for \$3 [or trade] or through the Fifth Estate distro in Pumpkin Hollow, Tennessee. I will send free copies to schools, libraries, or other educational projects, especially if you're really nice about it...)

A COLLECTION OF ROSS' WORKS

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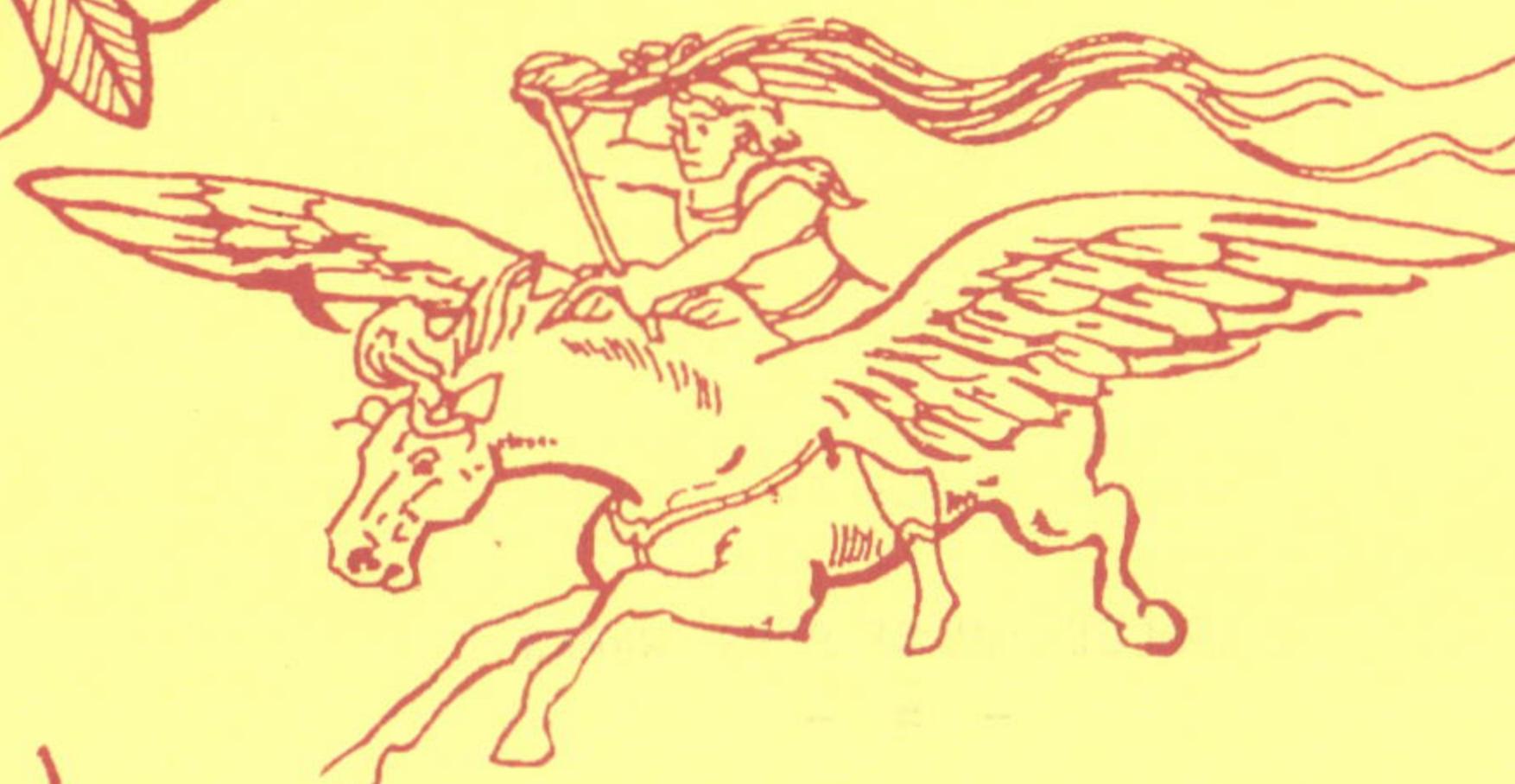
THEFIREBRAND.ORG/WINN

\* MORE INFORMATION? \*

ROSSWINN

(AT)

\* RISEUP.NET \*



Never has the power of the Ideal been demonstrated with greater force than in the life and work of this man, Ross Winn. For nothing short of a great ideal, a burning, impelling, all-absorbing ideal, could make possible the task that our dead comrade so lovingly performed during a quarter of a century.

- Emma Goldman in "Mother Earth"  
September, 1912